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THE NEW EDITION OF TIMROD.¹

THE appearance of the new edition of Timrod's poems last spring was hailed with delight by his admirers throughout the South, and was also warmly welcomed at the North. It well deserves much of the praise that has been bestowed upon it. The portrait of the poet which acts as a frontispiece seems to be decidedly the best picture of him extant; the price is moderate enough to place the book within the reach of lovers of poetry; there is a lengthy biographical and critical introduction; and the book is gotten up with all the typographical skill which is associated with the well-known firm that publishes it. In this last respect the edition is especially "a thing of beauty." On the other hand, there are certain defects to be found in it that deserve to be noted along with its excellences. Besides, a new edition of Timrod is an event in the literary world, particularly at the South, and it therefore demands more than a mere passing notice.

There have been published three separate editions of Timrod's poems. The first appeared in 1860 from the press of Messrs. Ticknor & Fields, of Boston, who seem to have had at that day a monopoly of American poetry. It was a modest little volume, very neatly printed, only 130 pages, but these contain, with but few exceptions, Timrod's best work, much of which had appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Russell's Magazine* during the ten years previous to 1860. In this volume were to be found such familiar lyrics as "Dreams," "The Problem," "The Arctic Voyager," "A Year's Courtship," "The Lily Confidante," and "To a Captive Owl"—in fact, nearly all his best poetry before the war, because "Two Portraits" and "Three Pictures,"²

¹ Poems of Henry Timrod. Memorial Edition. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1899.

² There is some doubt about this poem being Timrod's, though it is indexed as such in the various indexes of *Harper's Magazine*. It has never been included in any of the editions of the poet.

both of which were published in *Harper's Magazine*, really belong to that period. Hayne said truly of this volume of 1860: "A better *first* volume of the kind has seldom appeared anywhere." It must have been unsuccessful so far as sales were concerned, as it took about ten years to exhaust the edition; but the war, which was so destructive to Timrod in every way, is the explanation of that fact. A year or two after Timrod's death a Boston friend of Simms's, Mr. Alfred W. Austin, who seems to have been a sincere admirer of Timrod's poetry, bought at the publishers' some twenty copies (all that remained) of this first edition, and sent them South to Simms, to be sold for the benefit of the poet's family, thus showing that, despite the very recent unpleasantness, there were generous hearts at the North.

The second edition of Timrod was that edited by his intimate friend Paul Hamilton Hayne, and published by Messrs. E. J. Hale & Son, of New York. It first appeared in 1872, and ran into a second edition within a year, Hayne adding a number of poems that had been rejected by Timrod when he was preparing his poems for the press in 1862, an edition that was to be illustrated by Vizetelli, then the Southern war correspondent of the *London News*, and that was to appear in London, the war, however, preventing its publication. Hayne's edition contained a very long biographical sketch, full of interest and value, but written in a rather peculiar and recondite style, and the poems, though arranged in a very haphazard fashion, were fairly complete in number. Why Hayne should have omitted such a very graceful poem as "Florabel" (a reminder, though in much lighter vein, of Tennyson's "Lady Clara Vere de Vere"), which was in the 1860 volume, seems a mystery. The best of the poems that appear for the first time in a collected edition are "Katie," "A Cry to Arms," "Ethnogenesis," "Christmas," "The Cotton Boll," "Spring," and the Ode sung in Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, on the Decoration Day of 1867. It is pathetic to note that this last-named poem—which, E. P. Whipple said, "is, in its simple grandeur, the noblest poem ever written by a Southern poet"—was

practically the only thing in verse that Timrod did after the war, though he survived the surrender two years and a half. That period of his life is rich in a number of letters to Hayne and Simms that have been preserved, and they show but too plainly why he wrote so little poetry. Poetry brought him no money, and he was compelled to grind out in editorial and office work that which did. Besides, disease had laid its heavy hand on him, and he wrote to Hayne in 1866 that his story for the past year was "*beggary, starvation, death* (of his little boy), *bitter grief, utter want of hope.*" Is it not, therefore, a striking instance of how superior the poet was to the man that poverty and disease did not prevent his genius from blossoming at almost the last moment into such a beautiful and consummate flower of patriotic poetry?

Hayne's edition was a labor of love, and yet, despite its two drafts, it has become exceedingly scarce in either form, copies of it commanding a high price. It probably would have remained in print longer but for the failure of the Hales, which took place about 1885. The plates were sold at auction in New York, but no other imprint has come from them. It may be mentioned that in 1884 the Hales brought out an illustrated edition of "*Katie*," which was the subject of a criticism in *The Nation*. After reading the criticism I concluded that the reviewer had adopted Sidney Smith's plan of not reading the work he was to review; for it is strange that one could overlook the beauty of such lines as these:

The blackbird from a neighboring thorn
With music brims the cup of morn.

The lack of a purchasable edition of Timrod has led several students of his poetry to attempt to fill the void. But none, it seems, has been successful in obtaining a publisher, and all these individual attempts have thus far proved failures. The problem has, however, been happily solved by the organization of the Timrod Memorial Association, which is composed of a number of men prominent in literature and education in South Carolina. It is incorporated, I believe,

under the laws of that State, and its work, which has resulted in the production of this new edition of the poet, is worthy of all praise. It is also the intention of the Association "to erect a suitable public memorial to the poet" with the proceeds of this edition, and every one can heartily wish that it will have a large and ready sale.

The skeptical may ask why Timrod has been so neglected, if there are in his poetry elements that make it enduring and worthy of study thirty years after his death. One reason, I think, is that Timrod survived the war such a short time, and that in the midst of such a struggle for life and bread as were the reconstruction days he was forgotten—an oblivion only temporarily uncovered by the publication of Hayne's edition. His more fortunate contemporaries, Lanier and Hayne, lived far enough into the New South and kept before the public so well as not to be forgotten, however much they may have been neglected. I have been amazed within the past seven years at the ignorance of Timrod and his work at the South, one intelligent friend's comment being that "he must be a pretty good fellow, his name was so like Nimrod's." And right here I must pay a tribute to Mr. George R. Cathcart, a Charleston gentleman, who, I believe, went North after the war and engaged in the publishing business. His excellent "Literary Reader" was my boyish companion, and I early knew "A Common Thought" by heart. It was my introduction to Timrod, and I believe that "Reader" has done more than any other book to keep Timrod's memory alive at the South. I have heard other people, that never saw an edition of his poems, express the same opinion. Another reason why Timrod has been forgotten is that he was in no sense a popular poet. None of his war poems has ever taken such hold on the public mind as has "Maryland, My Maryland!" or "The Conquered Banner." None of his shorter lyrics has appealed to the elocutionist, as have "The Raven" and "The Bells," and some have almost come to think that nothing in poetry is worthy to be saved that is unfit for elocution. There is something in Timrod that appeals to a higher court than mere

popular applause. He is a poet that deserves careful reading and study, and new beauties of thought and expression appear at each reading.

But to return to the new edition. There is no editor mentioned, but the Hon. William A. Courtenay, to whom the original of the frontispiece belongs and who probably knows more personally of Timrod than any other living man, seems to be the moving spirit in the work. It is a pity that the "Introduction" has no name signed to it, and it is unfortunate also that it is not quite definite and complete enough. For this, it may be noticed, is the definitive edition of the poet, as it is copyrighted by his widow, now Mrs. Kate Lloyd. One could wish, therefore, that the greatest care had been put on it, and especially on the biographical sketch of Timrod. There are a number of his letters that might have been included, as they are easy of access and give by far the best picture of his life, especially during his last years. This is particularly true of one notable letter written just after the war to Mr. Richard Henry Stoddard. I hope to publish this letter later. Besides the "Introduction" contains some errors of statement. It is incorrect to say that "the present edition contains the poems of all the former editions," when three poems and one sonnet of the 1860 edition are left out, thus showing that that edition was not consulted—a fact further confirmed by the insertion in the new edition under the head of "Poems Now First Collected" of the sonnet beginning, "If I have graced no single song of mine," which is found, with the alteration of only a few words, in the 1860 edition. It is interesting to note that these same omitted poems are not included in Hayne's edition.

Again, it is stated in the introduction that Timrod "was the poet of the lost cause, the finest interpreter of the feelings and traditions of the splendid heroism of a brave people." This is true if we are considering the war poetry of the South from a literary point of view, but I do not believe it is true if we are merely looking for a popular martial lyric; and of what other value is most war poetry? In that respect, as I have said before, Father Ryan and James R. Randall far

surpass Timrod, if we may judge by subsequent success and popular applause. If one of Timrod's war lyrics has ever been set to music, I do not know it (one at least of his love lyrics has), and even some of the numerous collections of the war poetry of the Southern side do not contain a single one of his poems. So much the worse for these collections, for such an omission but shows the stupidity of their editors. Still, I believe that if Timrod lives far into the new century it will not be through his martial lyrics (we may except the "Decoration Ode," which really does not belong to the war period), but through his poems of sentiment, whether the inspiration is love, heroic endeavor, or philosophic musing.

When we come to examine with care the poems in the new edition, there seems to be no rule as to their arrangement. They are, if possible, arranged in a more heterogeneous fashion than in Hayne's edition, the volume opening with two poems evidently written during the war—"Spring" and "The Cotton Boll"—which are followed by a number of the *ante-bellum* poems. It is true there is a section entitled "Poems Written in War Times," but it does not contain several of the poems written during that period and it does contain the "Decoration Ode," which was not written until 1867. The chronological arrangement, it seems to me, is the proper one for a poet, and in Timrod's case such an arrangement could be made with fair accuracy. The dates of the appearance of all the poems that he contributed to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *Russell's Magazine* are procurable without difficulty, the war poems could be easily classified by subject and contents, the sonnets would form a collection by themselves, and the two *post-bellum* poems would come last. By this arrangement Timrod could be more easily read, studied, and understood, first, as a poet of sentiment; secondly, as a poet of patriotism; thirdly, as a writer of sonnets; and lastly, in the poverty of his output, as a victim of the terrible years after the war. One cannot but regret that the editor or editors of this new edition did not adopt a more rational system of arrange-

ment, and thus make Timrod more intelligible. In fact, it is doubtful if some of the poems here included should not have been relegated to an appendix in fine print or left out entirely, thus bringing into prominence his most distinctive productions. As it is, one has to wander and flounder around in the book in order to find what is best, and thus one possibly misses some "gem of purest ray serene." I say all this, not to depreciate the edition, but to show how, in my opinion, it might have made Timrod more presentable and more easy to appreciate.

After all, however, these are minor defects, for we have his poems that are most worthy of preservation before us, and above all in a well-bound and accessible volume. Such a thing was sorely needed, for Timrod deserves remembrance if any poet of the South does, and he has but to be known to be appreciated. We might afford to lose much of his work, but the little that would remain is almost priceless. When we consider his environment and his thwarted ambitions, when we think of his struggles against poverty and disease, and when we examine the products of his genius, the wonder is not that he should have written what he did, but that he should have written anything at all that was lasting. His "enchanting flute-melodies at intervals" entitle him to a fuller recognition and a more secure fame, and, in the words of another writer, "I cannot but believe that a day will come when his work will be more generally known than it is at present." And, I may add, nothing else will do so much good in that direction as the beautifully printed volume before us.

CHARLES HUNTER ROSS.